

Cartoons vs Anime, the gender problem!

Abstract

Gender discrimination is visible in western cartoons but also in Japanese anime. In western cartoons we see a big difference in cartoons that are mainly for girls and unisex cartoons. In the animated series for girls like 'power puff girls' we mainly see strong women rather than the objectified women we see in cartoons for boys who have to be saved by the strong hero. Japanese anime are different in this way. Not only are the girls in boys' anime or Shōnen weak and only there for their looks. But even in the girl anime or Shōjo, women still are weak and pretty. They fulfil the same role as in the Shōnen anime. Also in a test with 20 college students we saw that anime women have a better body than cartoon women. They filled out a questionnaire and most people thought that the anime girl looked better than the cartoon girl. So we can conclude that there is a lot more gender discrimination in Japanese anime than in western animated series.

1. Introduction

These days, there still are differences between men and women. These differences can not only be found in anatomy or looks, but also in the way they are treated; like what they get paid for doing the same job. This gender discrimination starts when we are babies. Parents handle daughters different than boys. For example, boys get to play with toy cars while girls get the Barbie dolls. Is this gender discrimination also visible in the cartoons we watch? Yes it is visible. This research paper will take a look at the differences in the view on women in our western cartoons and the Japanese anime. We know that the Asian culture is different from our western culture but how do these differences manifest in cartoons and anime? Are the women in anime presented differently from the women in cartoons? Or are they treated differently? These questions are the main questions answered in this paper.

2. Gender discrimination

Gender discrimination has always been there, it is still happening in this world today. At birth parents start the gender differentiation by using colours to distinguish girls from boys. Boys get everything blue whereas girls get everything in pink. In addition boys get action figures or toy cars and girls get Barbie dolls. Children begin to develop an idea of gender around the age of two (Ersoy, 2009). By that age they start to divide the world into male and female.

Parents seem to play an important role in gender discrimination. But that is not the case. The communication in school with friends and media play a much bigger part than the parents (Katz, P Q., & Boswel, S, 1986, pp. 112, 103-547). In the media, one gender often plays a dominant role. In particular male characters are more dominant than female characters. According to Williams, in 1992, 'most of the television programs are extensions of daily talk'. This means that we see what happens on TV as real events. So when the male character is dominant over the female character we regard this as normal. An important issue with this is that stereotypical gender roles are especially bad for girls' self-image (Gökçearsan, 2010).

3. Cartoon vs Anime

First of all, we will examine the differences between cartoons in western societies and anime in the Japanese society. Anime is a Japanese animation. In these animations, action plays an important role and there are stark colourful graphics. The themes in anime are often futuristic or fictional. (Merriam-Webster dictionary). Lines are used to create the illusion of a character moving and are one of the most important features of anime. Also large eyes and exaggerated facial expressions are common traits of anime (Aeschliman, 2010).

The western cartoons have some recurring characteristics as well. The good guys always win whereas the good guys in anime are fallible. An additional thing in cartoons is that there always is a moral message. And these comics are mostly for young people. Anime has genres for everyone from young girls to old men.

4. Cartoon vs Anime gender discrimination

We now know the difference between western comics and Japanese anime. We also know what gender discrimination is. But is there a difference in view on the gender role of women in cartoons and anime?

In cartoons, we see that over 90% of the characters are male. For example, the Smurfs, there are hundreds of Smurfs but there is only one girl (Gökçearsan, 2010). Also, females are seldom the leader than men and they are often shown as childish whereas the man is shown as a mature leader.

Even the fact that women are not as often found in managing jobs as men, can be seen in cartoons. Only 13% of the females in cartoons have a job, and these are all caretaker jobs like nurses, teachers, or nannies (Thompson ve Zerbinos, 1995 p.669).

Not all western cartoons discriminate on gender, for example 'Teletubbies' or 'Jellabies'. The characters in these cartoons are asexual. Hence male characters can't dominate female characters because there are no female or male characters. Ergo, "asexual characters can be more positively effective in children's future choices" (Gökçearsan, 2010, p. 5206).

Anime and manga are a reflection of the Japanese culture (Izawa, 2000). Japan is a very chauvinistic country where traditional gender roles are the only possible way of life. In Japan, the ideal person is a strong, cool male, whereas females are often seen as lackeys by their husbands. Another example for how women are treated in Japan is the hiring and firing of people. A female only gets hired when there are no more men for the job, and the first person who gets fired is most likely to be a woman as well.

Comics are mostly for young people, but anime is for everyone. There are anime for girls, boys, and adults, there even are porn anime. In the anime for boys or Shōnen, girls are often used as damsel-in-distress, or she will be rooting for her favourite man while he only thinks of his own goals (Izawa, 2000). In girls' anime or Shōjo the leading character is a girl. But even here a male character plays a very important part in the story. The heroine worships the male character, she thinks about him all the time. For example in the anime 'Kamikaze Kaito Jeanne' also known as 'Phantom-Thief Jeanne' the heroine is Jeanne. She is a sixteen year old high school student who has a crush on a boy named Chiaki. She always thinks about him and is insecure about whether he likes her back or not and if she's good enough for him (Shueisha, 1998). Thus even in anime for girls we can speak of gender discrimination.

In a test with 20 college students we saw that anime women have a better body than cartoon women. They filled out a questionnaire and most people thought that the anime girl looked better than the cartoon girl. This means that in anime females are being more objectified than females in cartoons. Anime girls are being pushed in the traditional gender roles. For example in 'Pokémon' children are taught that traditional gender roles are bad (Gökçearsan, 2010). The only female professions in the series are police officer, nurse, and teacher.

Therefore we can conclude that gender discrimination in all sorts of Japanese anime is worse than the gender discrimination in western cartoons.

5. Conclusion

We now know that gender discrimination is something of all time, but is not necessarily the same in every culture. In our western culture, there is sexism for example; women are paid less than men in the same job. But in Japan sexism is more present than in our society, they have to live strictly by the traditional gender roles.

This is something we also see in comics and anime, but in comics it is less apparent. For example animated series for girls like 'power puff girls', girls are strong and independent. Whereas girl characters in Shōnen anime are often a damsel-in-distress, with no opinion of her own, and worships the male character. In Shōjo anime however, the female character is the heroine. Although, that sounds like she is a strong and independent woman, she is actually insecure about herself and is dominated by the male character. She would do anything to please him.

And therefore we can conclude that both western cartoons and Japanese anime are discriminating by gender. But in anime, the sexism is more apparent than in western animated series because animations in both versions are reflections of the society. Thus, because the Japanese society is more conservative than ours, the gender discrimination in anime is worse than in our cartoons.

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